



Organizational Characteristics Associated with Risk of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the U.S. Army

Miriam Matthews, Andrew R. Morral, Terry L. Schell, Matthew Cefalu, Joshua Snoke, R. J. Briggs

www.rand.org/t/RRA1013-1

Researchers extended previous RAND analyses that produced estimates of sexual assault risk and sexual harassment risk across installations and commands. The results of these extended analyses showed considerable variation in the risk of sexual assault and sexual harassment across groups of soldiers, primarily among Army women—at installations, commands, and in career fields—and identified characteristics of groups in which risk level was higher.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How, if at all, do sexual assault risk and sexual harassment risk vary across groups of soldiers in the U.S. Army?
- What organizational and operational characteristics are associated with sexual assault risk and sexual harassment risk among soldiers?
- How stable or unstable is sexual assault risk and sexual harassment risk across groups of soldiers in the U.S. Army?



KEY FINDINGS

Results showed considerable variation in *total* sexual assault risk—estimated prevalence of sexual assault—across groups of soldiers

- Women at Fort Hood, Fort Bliss, and several other bases face total sexual assault risk that is higher than the risk faced by the average woman in the Army.
- Sexual harassment is more common than sexual assault in the Army, but results also showed that the risk of sexual harassment is highly correlated with the risk of sexual assault.

By examining *adjusted* sexual assault risk, the authors were able to estimate the extent to which personnel assigned to certain groups of soldiers might have higher or lower risk if assigned elsewhere

- Two of the five-highest adjusted sexual assault risk commands for women across the Army are located at Fort Hood; however, one of the commands with lower-than-expected risk for Army women is also based there.
- Field artillery and engineers are the two career fields with the highest adjusted sexual assault risk for Army women.

There are some group characteristics that are associated with higher adjusted risk for Army women's sexual harassment and sexual assault, as well as men's sexual harassment

- More-positive unit climate and supervisor climate scores are associated with lower adjusted sexual assault and sexual harassment risk among women and lower adjusted sexual harassment risk among men.
- Army women at bases with more civilians face lower adjusted sexual assault and sexual harassment risks.
- Army women in career fields with higher proportions of combat arms have higher adjusted sexual assault and sexual harassment risks.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- To optimize reductions in Army sexual assault rates, new or supplementary prevention programs that cannot be provided to the entire Army should be targeted to those bases, commands, and career fields that have large numbers of soldiers and high total sexual assault risk.
- The Army could use routinely collected survey data from the Defense Equal Opportunity Employment Survey or other surveys to more-rapidly identify units, commands, bases, career fields, or other groups of soldiers with high or rising risk of sexual assault and sexual harassment. The Army should consider investing some resources in developing these surveys to serve this purpose.
- The Army should consider developing climate-improvement interventions for commands, bases, and career fields with high adjusted sexual assault risk or sexual harassment risk and poor climate scores.
- The Army should investigate the differences in soldiers' experiences in similar groups with different risk profiles, such as the 2nd Infantry Division and the 4th Infantry Division, to understand what differences in work life, social life, culture, or climate could be contributing to women's risk exposure.
- The Army could conduct case studies of bases where adjusted sexual assault risk to women appears to have changed substantially between 2016 and 2018 and identify candidate causes of these changes.
- Decisionmakers should share historical sexual assault and sexual harassment risk information with unit commanders. Doing so can forewarn commanders of known problems that are likely to persist within their units. This information can sensitize the commanders to the possible need for special prevention measures and prepare them to address problems quickly.